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Ministry of Forests and Range

FIRST NATIONS RECEIVE FUNDING FOR PINE BEETLE RESPONSE

VICTORIA – The Province has provided the First Nations Forestry Council with $8.4 million to help deal with mountain pine beetle impacts, Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman announced today while officially opening the First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative Office near Prince George.

"We're working with First Nations to address the pine beetle challenge head-on," said Coleman. "We're enabling First Nations land-use planning at the community level, and also creating more job opportunities for First Nations on reforestation and wildfire crews."

A First Nations land-use planning program will be established, and information will be gathered concerning cultural and spiritual sites, non-timber forest products, wildlife and fisheries habitat, and social impacts for 80 First Nations in the infestation zone.

The $8.4 million is part of the Mountain Pine Beetle Protocol Agreement the Province signed with First Nations in April 2006 in response to the infestation.

"This agreement improves the ability of the Province and First Nations to work together on mountain pine beetle issues," said Chief David Walkem of the First Nations Forestry Council. "We can now gather and format valuable inventory information for participating in land-use planning around mitigation of beetle impacts to First Nations' traditional territories."

In the Mountain Pine Beetle Protocol Agreement, government has also committed to:

- funding wildfire protection and fuel management plans on provincial Crown land surrounding First Nation reserves;
- funding forest research priorities identified by First Nations;
- adding two First Nations positions to the Forest Science Board, which provides advice about strategies and priorities for the Forest Science Program of the Forest Investment Account;
- including First Nations participation on the provincial Mountain Pine Beetle Emergency Response Team;
- increasing recruitment of First Nations to wildfire crews; and
- developing First Nations' reforestation skills and expertise for increased employment opportunities resulting from the Forests for Tomorrow program.

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Working with First Nations to encourage coordination and mutual support in responding to the epidemic is part of the provincial Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan. For more information on the Action Plan, or to download a copy, visit www.gov.bc.ca/pinebeetle.

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